

# Gay American Divorce-Seekers Not Wanted

How the Aristocratic Elysee Quarter of Paris Has Rebelled Against Being Turned Into a Reno by Our Wealthy Society Women



Map of the Elysee Quarter, in the Heart of Paris, Where American Women Will Not Be Allowed to Bring Their Divorce Suits.



Madame Ganna Walska, the Former Chicago Opera Singer Who Is Now Suing Her Multi-Millionaire Husband Alexander S. Cochran for Divorce in Paris.



Mrs. Ogden L. Mills, Daughter of Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, Who Recently Obtained a Paris Divorce with Record Speed and Quietness.



Mrs. John Barrymore, Who Obtained a Paris Divorce from Leonard M. Thomas So Quietly That It Was Not Known in New York for Six Months.

The Charming Mrs. Robert Graves of New York, Who Has Gone to Paris to Seek a Divorce, It Is Stated, but Must Avoid the Conservative Quarter.

IT is now a matter of general knowledge that the most fashionable American women have lately been going to Paris for their divorces.

They say it is both pleasanter and easier to obtain a divorce in the French capital than in Reno, Nevada, or in any of the more accommodating American States. The delights of driving in the Bois de Boulogne by day and along the "grands boulevards" by night, while awaiting a decree, are far more attractive to the sophisticated type of American woman than idling about some Western "Main Street."

And then the French judges grant the divorce decrees with such exquisite courtesy and sympathy.

"May I have the pleasure of listening to madame's testimony?" is the judge's customary way of opening the proceedings.

But the other day something like consternation was aroused among our unhappy or dissatisfied women who thought they could always find refuge in an easy Paris divorce. A dispatch stated that the French courts, alarmed at the report that Paris was becoming another Reno, had decided to grant no more divorces to American citizens.

"No more easy Paris divorces for Americans," read one headline.

This was the announcement that caused so much alarm among temperamental society women who were planning to obtain their freedom from unsympathetic husbands while enjoying a delightful holiday. Inquiries were made of fashionable divorce lawyers and cables and letters were sent to Paris for exact information.

Now it has been made clear that there is no cause for alarm. The dispatch was misunderstood. Americans will still be able to obtain Paris divorces with reasonable comfort. The judges of the Parisian divorce courts merely decided to make divorce harder for Americans in one "arrondissement" out of the twenty into which Paris is divided. The "arrondissements" of Paris are something like boroughs, each having a mayor and "mairie," where marriages are performed and other legal formalities attended to.

The judges ordered that in the "Eighth Arrondissement" divorces should only be given to foreigners when both parties had their unquestionable legal residence in the district, and where they could offer unquestionable evidence that neither of them came there for the purpose of starting the suit. These rules would have excluded most of the Americans who have recently obtained divorces.

The Eighth Arrondissement, where easy divorce is forbidden, is the central residential district of Paris, containing the Elysee Palace, which is the residence of the President; the official homes of the Cabinet Ministers, the British Embassy and the mansions of the Rothschilds and many of the leaders of Paris society.

Information from Paris shows there is a strong objection among these distinguished persons to frivolous American women turning their elegant quarter into a little Reno. They do not want all the best apartments and houses of the quarter filled up by would-be American "divorcees."

Many of the inhabitants are very old fashioned and religious and do not believe in divorce at all. They are afraid that their families might learn disturbing ideas by living in proximity to restless American women. These old citizens have great influence and they have prevailed on the judges to issue this new ruling, which is quite in accordance with legal procedure, as the judges have a wide latitude about taking jurisdiction in divorce cases.

Divorce has been denounced recently with great warmth by the clergy of this quarter. A few weeks ago the Abbe Wetterle, rector of St. Philippe du Roule, the most aristocratic church of the district, declared from his pulpit:

"To-day, it appears, we are living in a reversal of the ancient condition of female slavery, for now a woman is a man's wife only as long as she is attracted to him."

Such denunciations have had an important effect in procuring the judges' ruling. But American women still have plenty of territory in Paris in which they can file their divorce suits, provided they do not make themselves so conspicuous that even the gayest sections of the city will not tolerate them.

Even if the new rules should be extended to cover a little more of the central part of the city, as they may be, that will not inconvenience American women of social prominence who prefer the fewer and brighter quarters around the Bois de Boulogne.

When a request for information was made of Francis L. Wellman, the New York lawyer who has acted as counsel for many Americans seeking Paris divorces, he explained:

"There is nothing in the new decision of the Parisian judges to prevent Americans from obtaining their divorce with comparative ease. It only applies to the central arrondissement of Paris. There are nineteen other arrondissements in Paris and all the rest of France in which a plaintiff can establish a residence and bring a suit. This ought to be sufficient for most of those who seek relief."

"Divorce is certainly made a very simple, refined and easy matter in France. It is merely necessary that the parties should not wish to live together. The judge questions first one party and then the other, and after that both of them together. If the defendant persists that he or she will not live with the other, the way is easy. In such a case there is always some act which can be construed by the judge as 'cruelty' and a legal ground of divorce."

From other New York lawyers who had guided their clients in securing Parisian divorces similar information was obtained, as well as other points of interest.

Since the disturbing dispatch was published several prominent society women

have departed for Paris with plans which are believed to include a quiet divorce.

Mrs. Robert Graves, a very fashionable and attractive New York society leader, has planned to go to Paris. Her friends say that she and her husband have separated and that she has decided to start divorce proceedings. It was understood that Mr. Graves would start for Paris at nearly the same time as his wife, but by a different steamship.

Mr. Graves inherited an immense fortune from his father, the head of "The Wall Paper Trust." He and his wife have been noted for the fairytale entertainments they have given at their villa at Roslyn, L. I., as well as in New York. They also entertained a great deal on their magnificent yacht, the Black Watch.

Until a few weeks ago they seemed perfectly happy, but now comes the significant trip to Paris.

Mr. and Mrs. Graves have had an extensive experience of divorce procedure in America, and they must have gone to Paris because they feel that it will be an improvement on Reno.

Mrs. Graves had been married before and obtained her last divorce in Reno. She married Mr. Graves within twelve days of her divorce. He had been married twice before—once divorced and once a widower. Another interesting candidate for a Paris divorce is Madame Ganna Walska, the charming opera singer, whose hasty marriage to the multi-millionaire, Alexander Smith Cochran, came to wreck after three months. She is now seeking a divorce in Paris without opposition from her husband, having received, it is stated, \$1,000,000 in cash, \$500,000 insurance policy and houses in New York and Paris.

"Mr. Cochran must be made to pay till it hurts. He thinks he can get rid of a wife as easily as a horse, but I will show him that he cannot," Madame Walska has said with spirit.

It would be possible to make up a long list of American women who have recently gone to Paris for their divorces, but all are not equally interesting.

Mrs. Charles W. Fletcher, of Englewood, N. J., formerly Catherine Westinghouse, daughter of the Pittsburgh inventor and millionaire, has just obtained a Paris divorce. She was back living in her American home when the decree was announced.

Another interesting recent Paris divorce was that of Mrs. Charles de Looney Oelrichs, sister-in-law of Mrs. John Barrymore. Mrs. Oelrichs was Miss Marjorie Turnbull and was noted for the originality and beauty of her gowns. She is one of the society women who have gone into trade and conducts a dainty shop for the sale of perfumery and handkerchiefs.

One of the quietest Parisian divorces was that obtained by young Mrs. Ogden L. Mills, Jr., formerly Miss Margaret Ruthenford, daughter of Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt. She left New York in March of one year and in May had obtained her divorce. No announcement of the decree was published in Paris and very few people in New York society knew that she and her husband had disagreed.

"I mustn't say any more about it," said Mrs. Mills. "Mamma mightn't like it."

Her sister, Barbara, obtained a divorce from Cyril Hatch with the same quietness and dispatch.

The former Mrs. Leonard Thomas, the noted beauty, poet and suffragist leader,

also secured prompt freedom in Paris. Soon afterward she became the wife of the actor, John Barrymore, with whom she is occasionally seen in theatrical circles. Her maiden name was Blanche Oelrichs. It was six months after the Paris decree before New York heard of the occurrence.

Frank Jay Gould, youngest son of the famous financier, obtained a Paris divorce from his second wife, Edith Kelly, in 1918. In that case all has not been plain sailing, for the wife has been contesting the validity of the divorce ever since.

A New York lawyer, who has been interested in securing Parisian divorces for his clients, furnished this further information concerning the Parisian legal procedure:

"It is entirely in the discretion of the judge whether to take jurisdiction or not in a case between foreigners. There is no fixed period required to establish a residence, but the judges have usually required six months' residence by the plaintiff. The residence need not be continuous. What weighs most with the judge in

taking cognizance of the case is that both parties accept the jurisdiction of the court. "When the wife files her complaint the judge questions her and asks her if she is sure she wants a divorce and why. If necessary, he will go to her house and take her testimony. Then he sends to her husband and asks him why he does not live with his wife."

"After this the judge orders both parties to appear before him at a certain date within ten days. They must appear before what is called a 'Court of Conciliation.' The judge then makes an effort to bring about a reconciliation between them, which he is required by law to do. If he is unable to reconcile them he makes his report, which is sent to a higher court, which is really the divorce court. The superior judge considers the report and gives his decree. This may be obtained in three months after beginning proceedings."

"All the proceedings may be conducted in what is practically absolute secrecy. Although the decree is supposed to be public, it is recorded in such a way that only the persons interested know of it."

"The grounds on which French law grants divorce are infidelity, excesses, bodily injuries, grave insults and condemnation to imprisonment. Most of these causes have little to do with Americans, since both parties have usually agreed that the divorce is desirable. The cause which is usually sufficient for Americans is included under the term 'grave insults,' which is a translation of the French phrase, 'injures graves.'"

"Almost any harshness or roughness of manner or language may be construed by the court as a 'grave insult' and ground for divorce. The court takes into consideration the social standing of the parties. Thus an act which might not be considered a serious insult in one social station might be so considered in a higher one."

"It has been held sufficient cause for divorce in France that a man has not given any marked sign of affection toward his wife for more than a month. That is to say, such neglect constitutes a serious insult under the law. French wives require a great deal of attention in their way, and this point receives due consideration."

"If a Frenchman has called his wife a 'camel,' that is an insult of the gravest character, and the judge will hold up his hands in amazement."

"It is most important that American husbands and wives, who are going to Paris for the purpose of obtaining a divorce by mutual agreement, should not allow any evidence of this fact to come before the court."